WITHDRAWN

THE LORD WE LOVE

CHARLES R. ERDMAN

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THE LORD WE LOVE

CHARLES R. ERDMAN

By CHARLES R. ERDMAN

The Gospel of John, an Exposition
The Gospel of Matthew
The Gospel of Mark
The General Epistles
The Acts
The Gospel of Luke
The Pastoral Epistles of Paul
Coming to the Communion
The Return of Christ
Within the Gateways of the Far East
The Work of the Pastor

232
E66

THE LORD WE LOVE

Devotional Studies in the Life of Christ

BY

CHARLES R. ERDMAN

PROFESSOR OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY, PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

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FOREWORD

There is only one who can solve for all the problems which perplex the soul. To increase confidence in his present sympathy and power, by centring thought upon certain significant scenes from the records of his earthly life, has been the purpose of these studies. In substance, some have appeared previously in the Westminster Teacher and in the New Testament Expositions published by the Westminster Press. Permission for their present use is gratefully recognised. The completed series is sent forth with the hope that it may aid in deepening devotion to him whom not having seen we love.

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I: The Hymns of the Nativity

"My soul doth magnify the Lord,

"And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

"For he hath looked upon the low estate of his handmaid: For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

"For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; And holy is his name."

(*Luke* 1:46-49)

"Blessed be *the Lord, the God of Israel; For he hath visited and wrought redemption for his people,*

"And hath raised up a horn of salvation for us."

(*Luke* 1:68, 69)

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth among men in whom he is well pleased."

(*Luke* 2:14)

"Now lettest thou thy servant depart, O Lord, according to thy word, in peace: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

"Which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples;

A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."

(*Luke* 2:29-32)

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I: The Hymns of the Nativity

It is not strange that the festival of the Nativity holds so chief a place among the holy days and holidays of the Christian Church, for it is a time of universal rejoicing and gladness and good will. It is natural too that the most sacred sentiments of this season should be embodied and expressed in carols and anthems and hymns, for inspired songs form an essential and prominent feature in the story of our Saviour's birth.

It is true that the actual event, so involved in mystery and in miracle, is recorded by both Luke and Matthew with such delicacy and reserve, yet with such definiteness and detail, as to make it quite evident that they were not dealing with a myth nor composing a poetic idyl, but were recording sober, historic fact. Luke, however, has enriched his account by including a series of sacred songs which for centuries have been sung in the services of the

Christian Church and are dear to every Christian heart.

There are four of these hymns of the Nativity, and from the first words of their Latin form they are known as the *Magnificat,* the *Benedictus,* the *Gloria in Excelsis* and the *Nunc Dimittis.* Only the third of these belong strictly to Christmas day; two were sung before and one after the birth of Christ; only the Song of the Angels sounded forth on the holy morning when the Prince of Peace was born. However, all breathe the Christmas spirit, all bear messages of Christmas joy and all prolong the same notes of praise and thanksgiving to God.

The first is the lovely lyric which fell from the lips of Mary the mother of our Lord. She had received from an angel messenger the astounding announcement of the manner of the Saviour's birth. Hiding the sacred secret in her heart she had hastened to the hill country of Judea, to the home of her kinswoman Elisabeth. Her salutation had been answered by Elisabeth in words of such rhythmic cadences that they are regarded by many as themselves

forming a hymn. "Blessed are thou among women," she was heard to say, "and blessed is she that believed, for there shall be a fulfilment of the things which have been spoken to her from the Lord."

No wonder that Elisabeth emphasised the fact that Mary had "believed." Faith more sublime had never been shown. Knowing that she faced possible suspicion, shame, suffering or death, Mary had so trusted in the power of God and had so submitted to his will that in place of fear, her heart was bursting with exultant joy. This she expressed in her inspired canticle of praise: *"Magnificat anima mea Dominum"* ("my soul doth magnify the Lord"). Thus she begins the hymn in which she exalts the holiness and might and faithfulness and grace of God. She speaks in the language of Scripture. The hymn is a perfect mosaic of Old Testament phrases. In particular there are clear echoes of the song of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, sung when her heart like that of Mary was rejoicing in the promised birth of a son. Mary believes that her Son is to fulfil all the promises made to the fathers, all the hopes of Israel, and that

because of his birth all generations would call her blessed.

Thus hers is a hymn of hope, a hymn of thanksgiving, a hymn of praise, but most of all, a hymn of faith; and surely the first message of Christmas should be a call to believe, to obey, to submit and to trust. When real faith is present then in some true sense Christ is born anew in our hearts, he comes to us again.

"No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still,
The dear Christ enters in."

The *Benedictus* is likewise a hymn of thanksgiving and a hymn of faith. When to Zacharias, the aged priest, had come the promise of a son, his lips were sealed by unbelief, but when the promise had been fulfilled, his tongue was loosed and he sang this hymn of gratitude to God. Doubt is always depressing; infidelity has no real hymns; but faith is jubilant and thanksgiving is naturally expressed in song.

The supreme note of this hymn, however, is

"salvation." It centres our thought on the truest ground for Christmas joy.

"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel;
For he hath visited and wrought redemption for his people;
And hath raised up a horn of salvation for us
In the house of his servant David."

This salvation of which Zacharias sang was not merely a deliverance of God's people from political enemies, but was to consist

"In the remission of their sins;"

it was to issue in holiness and in a service free from fear.

While the occasion of this hymn was the birth of John, the forerunner of Jesus, yet only one stanza refers to this event. The whole burden of the hymn is the advent of the Messiah and the blessings he will bring. It bears, therefore, a real Christmas message as it speaks of "the tender mercy of God," of "the dayspring from on high," and of the Sun of Righteousness which is to arise upon the helpless, terrified wanderers of the night who are seated "in darkness and the shadow of death,"

and as it praises him who has come "to guide our feet into the way of peace."

"Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Risen with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth."

The last word of the *Benedictus* is "peace," and this is the keynote of the anthem which floated over the Judean plain on the night of the Nativity. As subsequently expanded by Christian worshippers this outburst of melody is known as the *Gloria in Excelsis.* This song of the angels is given with a slight variation in the different versions of the Bible.

"Glory to God in the highest
And on earth peace,
Good will toward men"

is the more familiar form; but the Revisers prefer to print the hymn in two verses

"Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men in whom he is well pleased."

In either case we distinguish the responsive chords "glory" and "peace," "in the highest" (heaven) and "on earth." This too is a hymn of praise and of gratitude to God. It also is a hymn of faith and a hymn of salvation. It sounded out as the response of a heavenly choir when an angel had brought the glad tidings "there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord."

It was in this gift of a Saviour that God had manifested in heaven his excellence and on earth had revealed his grace to men who were the recipients of his favour and good will. The result of this gift is declared to be "peace," and it is true that only in Christ can peace be found, peace with God, peace for the human heart, peace between men, peace for the weary, restless nations of the world.

It was to a band of shepherds that this heavenly anthem came. These men of humble toil were the first to receive the Christmas message, they were the first to know the Christmas joy. They hastened to Bethlehem; they found the Saviour and then, when they had shared with others the great glad tidings, they returned to their lowly tasks inspired with new

joy and hope. The light had faded from the skies, the heavenly harmonies were stilled, but the shepherds knew of a living Christ and they gave to the world a Christmas anthem which still cheers countless hearts with melodies that never die, but fill the darkest hours of earth with the brightest hopes of heaven.

"And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow,—
Look now! for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing:
O rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing."

The last hymn also sounds the note of peace, but its distinctive message is that of universal hope. The *Nunc Dimittis* (Now Lettest Thou Depart), unlike the *Magnificat* and the *Benedictus,* promises redemption not only to Israel but to all the world. It is the song of the aged Simeon. To this devout soul it had been revealed that he should not die until he had seen the Messiah, the "Lord's Christ." Led by the Spirit to the Temple while the parents of Jesus were there presenting their Son before the

Lord, he took the little babe in his arms and sang the sweetest and most solemn song of the Nativity.

"Now lettest thou thy servant depart . . . in peace"; the figure of speech is full of beauty; it is the word of a faithful watchman who welcomes with joy the hour of his dismissal, for he has caught the vision of the coming One; now he is about to be sent away in the peace of an accomplished task, in the peace of fulfilled hope; for his eyes have seen the Saviour, according to the promise of the Lord. The redemption which the Messiah brings, as the song continues to declare, is for "all peoples"; it is a light to reveal the way of salvation to the Gentiles, while it is indeed the true glory of the favoured people, Israel.

Thus the song of Simeon re-echoes the anthem which the angels sang and inspires hopes of a better and brighter age for all mankind.

"For lo, the days are hastening on,
By prophet bards foretold,
When with the ever-circling years
Comes round the age of gold;
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendors fling,
And the whole world give back the song
Which now the angels sing."

II: The Visit of the Magi

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold, Wise-men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we saw his star in the east, and are come to worship him" (*Matthew* 2:1-2).

II: The Visit of the Magi

Fancy has been allowed to play so freely with the story of the "Wise-men from the east," that in most minds it is difficult to dissociate the elements of fable from those of fact. It is commonly imagined that these Wise Men were kings, that they were three in number, that they were named Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, that one came from Greece, one from India, and the third from Egypt. All these statements belong to the realm of fiction, as do the descriptions of their journey and of their retinue, and the stories of their later life, and of their baptism by Thomas. It is even said that their bones were discovered in the fourth century by Saint Helena, were brought to Constantinople and deposited in the Church of Saint Sophia, subsequently transferred to Milan, and finally brought by Frederick Barbarossa to Cologne, where the three skulls are guarded to-day in a golden shrine in the great cathedral.

In reality nothing is known of these Wise Men in addition to the few brief statements here recorded by Matthew. Out of the mystery of their past they step upon the stage for only one short scene and then they disappear forever. However, the part they play is not unimportant and the lessons they bring are full of meaning.

Their designation as "Wise-men" is a translation of the Greek word "Magi," a name by which they are familiarly known, and from which have come such terms as "magic" and "magician." They were probably members of an Oriental princely caste, who were familiar with astronomy or astrology, and who had been taught by Jews of the Dispersion to expect the coming of a Saviour, a universal King. Some sign in the heavens convinced them that such a Prince had appeared and they journeyed to Jerusalem, the capital city of the Jews, to render to the King who had been born the homage which was his due. The important point is that these men were heathen and that they represent the first fruits of the Gentile

nations. They symbolise the truth that in the great world to-day there are countless hungry hearts yearning for a divine Saviour and ready to follow even faint and imperfect signs which may lead to his feet.

The background of the story is peculiarly dark. "When Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." The cruel and suspicious tyrant feared that his power might be endangered by one who was reputed to be born "King of the Jews"; and the people themselves, who should have rejoiced in the announcement that their Deliverer had come, were distressed rather than gladdened by the arrival and the strange story of the Wise Men. Herod seems to have been the only one who was stirred to action or sufficiently concerned to aid the travellers in their quest. He summoned the Jewish leaders to learn from them where their promised Messiah was to be born. They knew exactly; they were familiar with the prophecy which pointed to Bethlehem, but they showed not the slightest interest in the possibility that their Messiah had appeared. It was Herod who closely questioned the Wise

Men and sent them to report concerning "the young child," promising, hoary hypocrite that he was, to "come and worship him."

Thus it is now; many who are most familiar with the facts concerning Christ are least interested to accept him as their Lord, while others, like Herod, are hostile to him, fearing that to admit his claims may result in some personal loss.

Here, too, is a lesson in divine guidance. God gave the Wise Men a sign in the East; he led them to Jerusalem; he spoke to them from the Scripture; he directed them to Bethlehem, and finally showed them how to return to their homes in safety. Where hearts are eager to find the King, there are always provided signs which lead at last into his presence chamber. The method of guidance may be mysterious; the fact is certain. In the case of the Wise Men it is impossible to affirm what is meant by "the star, which they saw in the east." Was it a planet or a conjunction of planets, or one of those variable stars which sometimes flash forth with unwonted brilliance? An actual star might have guided them westward and

southward, but how could a star move before them on that last brief journey and stand over a definite house in the little town of Bethlehem? It seems probable that the guidance was supernatural. Something like a star in appearance, but near the earth, may have been granted to lead those travellers to their sacred goal. It has been conjectured that it was the "cloud of glory" which had led the people through the wilderness, the chariot of Jehovah, the pavilion of the King. Here speculation is futile, the reality is plain; where men really are eager to learn the truth concerning Christ, providences are granted which give them occasion to rejoice "with exceeding great joy."

The third familiar lesson concerns the service of Christ. It is embodied in the picture of the Wise Men as "They fell down and worshipped him; and opening their treasures they offered unto him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh." When one sees the King in his beauty, when one recognises in Christ the divine Saviour, there is always awakened the desire to render to him priceless offerings. It is not necessary to regard the gifts of the Magi

as symbols; but they were surely princely and precious. They rightly indicate that the acceptance of Christ involves the devotion to him of praise, and of love, and of treasure, and of toil, and of life.

"As they offered gifts most rare
At that manger rude and bare;
So may we with holy joy,
Pure, and free from sin's alloy,
All our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to Thee, our heavenly King."

III: The Baptism of Jesus

"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John would have hindered him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? But Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffereth him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him; and lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (*Matthew* 3: 13-17).

III: The Baptism of Jesus

Why did Jesus submit to be baptised at the hands of John? This is a pertinent and perplexing question for all who are seriously studying the life of our Lord, for we remember that John came preaching "the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins," and Jesus was sinless; why then was he baptised?

John himself realised the difficulty; for the time, he shared our perplexity and hesitated to baptise One whose moral faultlessness he recognised, saying, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?"

The reply of Jesus was sufficiently definite to overcome the reluctance of John, but so mysterious in itself as to need some explanation, "Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."

Possibly the first phrase means, "Do not hesitate, I am assuming a symbolic rôle, I am not confessing sin or the need of cleansing, but I am performing an act full of significance and meaning; my allowing you to administer this

rite is but for a moment; my taking a place among penitent sinners is only for a time, and in order to teach certain great truths." Then he added, "Thus it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness." That is, thus we shall accomplish what God wills, thus we shall do what is right. What, therefore, did Jesus teach, and why was it right for him to be baptised by John?

First of all, by this act he set his seal upon the work of John, as of "a man, sent from God," a man whose ministry was according to the will of God, and he attested the message of John, namely, that repentance and confession of sin are absolutely necessary for one who wishes to enter the Kingdom of God.

John was the great herald of the King, and his proclamation is of unchanged meaning today; sorrow for sin and abandonment of sin are absolutely necessary in case one is to receive salvation and to enter the service of Christ.

Further too, in his submission to baptism, Jesus identified himself with his nation and

with all mankind. He was sinless, yet he was able to sympathise with sinners in their sufferings, in their sorrows, and in their struggles against sin. He was "touched with the feeling of our infirmities"; he was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." It is because we have such a Saviour that we are encouraged to "draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need."

Then again, as baptism was for each penitent a sign of a definite break with the past and of the beginning of a new life of holiness and obedience, so in the hour of baptism, Jesus ended his quiet years of preparation and entered upon his public ministry of service and sacrifice which was to be performed in obedience to his Father's will. Thus, too, his followers of to-day reach crises in life where new burdens are to be assumed, new tasks undertaken, new struggles begun, and they find it necessary to turn from the past to the mysterious future, not knowing whither they are being led, but confident that they are obeying the will of God.

The sequel to such an experience is, for the follower of Christ, measurably what it was for Christ himself, namely, a real baptism, not with water, but with the Spirit of God, for as Jesus went up "from the water," "the heavens were opened upon him, and he saw the spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him; and lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

This was the essential feature of the significant event: the vision of the descending Spirit was a symbolic indication of the divine power by which his ministry was to be accomplished; and the voice from heaven was an assurance that he was indeed the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Both were thus vitally related to his baptism. He then had yielded himself to his task, he now is prepared for his service; he then dedicated himself to his work; he now is consecrated to his career. We are not to suppose that before he had lacked the presence of the Spirit, or that now he assumed any new relationship to the Father, but at the hour of baptism there came a new assurance of divine power and sonship.

Thus for the followers of Christ, it is true

that while they all are granted the abiding presence of the Spirit, nevertheless, when they yield themselves anew to the service of their Lord, they are filled anew with his Spirit, empowered for their tasks and strengthened by deeper assurance that they are indeed the sons of God.

"Come, gracious Spirit, heavenly Dove,
With light and comfort from above;
Be Thou our Guardian, Thou our Guide;
O'er every thought and step preside."

IV: The Temptation of Jesus

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" (*Matthew* 4:1).

"Having then a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need" (*Hebrews* 4:14-16).

IV: The Temptation of Jesus

The most important, the most memorable, the most mysterious, battle in history was the conflict between Jesus and the Devil. It is not to be supposed that this was the first or last assault of the false against the rightful Ruler of this world; but the experience which closed the forty days spent by Jesus in the wilderness was a type and summary of all the attacks of Satan and a pledge and prophecy of his final defeat.

The time is significant. "Then," when at his baptism Jesus had been assured of his divine sonship and had become conscious of his supernatural powers, "Then was Jesus . . . tempted," and to this new consciousness and experience each attack of the enemy was related. The seasons of highest spiritual exaltation are often followed by those of greatest moral peril; after the opening skies the descending Spirit and the heavenly voice, come

the whisper of the demon and the serpent's hiss. So, too, every enlarged power, every advancement in life, every increased privilege, is accompanied by some new danger to the soul.

"Jesus was led . . . into the wilderness to be tempted," and the place is likewise suggestive, for in the hour of bitter struggle and testing the human heart is conscious of peculiar loneliness and isolation; happy is he who is then conscious of the presence of a divine Deliverer and of angel ministers.

Jesus was "led up of the Spirit . . . to be tempted," for it was in accord with a divine purpose and its issue was an unbounded benefit; Jesus was thus prepared to meet triumphantly every temptation of his earthly ministry, and his followers are assured of his sympathy in their hours of deepest darkness and of his strength in places of most desperate need.

The first temptation was in the sphere of bodily appetite. After forty days of fasting there had come the reaction of ravenous hunger. "The tempter came and said unto him, If thou art the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." Why not? The

desire for food was innocent, the need was imperative, and he had the power to secure instant relief; but had Jesus resorted to miracle to gratify his human desire and to relieve his personal needs, he would have separated himself from the experiences of men, he would have surrendered the very purpose of his mission; for him there would have been no suffering and in the end no cross, for us there now would be none to sympathise and none to save. A divine impulse had driven him into the wilderness as a divine purpose had brought him into the world, he must endure as a man, whatever the divine purpose may involve; there will be times and places for miracles, but never to gratify any selfish desire. Divine sonship secured superhuman powers, but it obligated perfect submission to the will of God. It is the custom of the Tempter to entice men to gratify innocent desires in wrong ways; and many careers are ruined by devoting to selfish indulgence the powers which have been designed for higher service.

The real character of this temptation is revealed by the quotation which Jesus makes from the Old Testament. By one flash the

battery of the enemy is unmasked and is silenced, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Jesus recognised his need, but he was resolved to depend upon God for its supply. The Devil had been tempting him to doubt the goodness or the power of God. Jesus declared that as his Father had sustained Israel in the wilderness, so now he would sustain his Son; then it had been by bread from heaven, how it now might be he did not know: he left that in the hands of God; he knew that he was in way of his Father's will and he knew that his Father would supply his need. To say that the phrase, "Man shall not live by bread alone," implies that man has higher powers and capacities which physical food cannot satisfy, is quite aside from the point. It was exactly physical food which Jesus had in mind; this was his need; and he resisted the temptation to an improper gratification of bodily appetite by his belief that God would supply every real need, and that however strong the demand of appetite might be, the way and the will of God were certain to secure satisfaction and the truest blessings of life.

The second temptation was in the sphere of intellectual curiosity. The Devil had failed to make Jesus doubt; he takes him at his word and now tries to drive him to the other extreme of presumptuous trust. He leads him to "the pinnacle of the temple" and urges him to cast himself down. Why should he? Just to see what the experience would be. As he is the Son of God, he is tempted to test the providential care of his Father. He is asked to put himself in a situation of mortal peril and to trust in God to deliver him by supernatural power. To strengthen his suggestion the Devil cites Scripture, as he always can for his purpose, "He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and on their hands they shall bear thee up." By this device Satan still seeks to destroy human souls. He urges men to "see for themselves," to increase their knowledge by experiences which needlessly endanger their purity, their credit, their health, their honour, to place themselves in moral peril, to live beyond their means, to undertake tasks beyond their strength. He does this even in the holiest places, even in full sight of the Temple where faith will be strongest, even in Chris-

tian service; he bids them to trust in God, and assures them that as children of God, as men of strong principles, as followers of Christ, no harm can possibly befall them, that God will work miracles and will preserve them.

Jesus met the temptation and the text by another quotation which showed that Satan had misapplied the Scripture, "Again it is written, Thou shalt not make trial of the Lord thy God." To compel God to rescue us, to put him to the test, to see whether or not he will act, is not faith but presumption, not belief but distrust. In the path of actual duty the child of God need not fear the most threatening perils, but one who puts himself in unnecessary danger cannot expect divine deliverance.

The third temptation was in the sphere of personal ambition. Jesus was offered "all the kingdoms of the world." It was not unnatural that Jesus should desire universal rule; this he claimed; this he expected; this he will yet attain; but not on the Devil's terms, "If thou wilt fall down and worship me." Of course not; what could be more abhorrent to the Son

of God? He has ready his inspired reply, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." However, for even the followers of Christ, there is subtle power in this appeal of the Tempter. He does not ask them to give up their high purposes of ultimate helpfulness and service to others and to the world; he only asks them to compromise with evil as a means of attaining the goal. He insists that the end will justify the means. He intimates that in the world of commerce, or society, or politics, evil methods are so much in vogue that success can be attained only by complicity with evil. He tells us that this is his world and we can rule only in so far as we make terms with him.

For Christ the issue was now clearly drawn, it was submission to Satan and an easy way to worldly popularity and temporary power, or it was loyalty to God with conflict and toil and tears and a cross, but then a universal and an eternal throne. That same choice is for his followers; for them unswerving loyalty is the way of the cross but that is the way of the crown.

"Then the devil leaveth him; and behold, angels came and ministered unto him." Victory is possible, and after the conflict comes glad refreshment for all who fight with the sword of the Spirit and trust in the Son of God.

V: Jesus at Jacob's Well

"Jesus answered and said unto her, Every one that drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life" (*John* 4:13, 14).

V: Jesus at Jacob's Well

It would be difficult to find a finer piece of dramatic writing than is contained in the dialogue between Jesus and the woman at Jacob's well, and in the subsequent narrative of her testimony to her fellow townsmen. To regard it as fiction is to credit John with miraculous literary skill. He must have seen and heard what is here recorded. Therefore, as a narrative of fact, it challenges our attention to notice what Christ claimed for himself, how he developed faith in those who were willing to receive his word, and what he promised to those who put their trust in him.

The narrative is full of encouragement for all who are sincerely seeking for light on religious problems; for it shows how faith may be gradually enlarged and strengthened. This woman looked upon Jesus, at first, as being merely a weary traveller, a Jew, then as "a prophet," and finally as the "Messiah" whom

her townsmen call "the Saviour of the world."

Here, too, is great encouragement for all who are labouring as witnesses for Christ. They are assured of "fields, . . . white already unto harvest" if they are only ready to lift up their eyes, to speak to passing strangers, to testify where opportunities are offered.

Most of all is the story instructive to those who wish to learn the method of approach to the souls who are in need of Christ. We cannot, of course, follow the example of Christ exactly, in every case, appealing to just so many motives in his precise order; but we can find here illustrations of those attitudes of heart and mind to which we must appeal, if we are to bring men and women into vital fellowship with Christ, and into the enjoyment of that life which is promised to those who believe in him.

We notice first of all that Jesus makes a request appealing to sympathy. "Give me to drink." Not only would the mention of his pitiful thirst touch the heart of a woman, but the fact that a Jew would ask drink of a Samaritan would indicate that he felt sym-

pathy for her. In asking a favour, the petitioner, for the time, places himself upon a level with the person he addresses. Christ was a Rabbi, but he was willing to speak to a woman, a poor woman who was performing the act of a servant, a woman who was a social outcast, a woman who belonged to a despised race. The very fact that he should make a request of her made her willing to listen further to what he had to say. He opened the way for a conversation by his first wise sympathetic word. He made her suspect that something beside his thirst led him to address her.

So Christ is always seeking openings by which to bring messages to our careless souls. If our hearts are open to him, if we really are willing to learn, we are sure to receive from him revelations of light and hope. Then, too, if one would approach a needy soul with Christian truth he must make an effort "to win at the start," to establish some common ground, to make it evident that he desires to confer a benefit, that he feels true unselfish interest and concern.

Jesus then makes a claim appealing to curiosity. If this had been aroused already by

his request, it is now fanned into a flame by the statement which falls from his lips: "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." That is the way to arouse curiosity: "If you knew; but of course you do not!" The woman at once is asking herself who he can be. Does he claim to be greater than Jacob who gave the well?

What are the claims of Christ? What does he say of himself? Does he declare that he is more than man, even the divine Son of God? If men are to be saved, they must be brought seriously to consider exactly these questions. It is indifference which is so perilous. When a man is aroused to consider the words and the claims of Christ recorded in the Gospel, he is certain to find more light.

Next, Jesus makes a promise appealing to conscious need: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." Satisfaction was exactly that for which this poor woman was longing. She had sought for it all her life, and in her search she had been

restrained by no laws of God or of man; but she was thirsting still, and the thirst would never be satisfied till she found in Jesus a personal Lord and Saviour.

Men need to know the claims of Christ; but they should hear his promise as well. There is in every heart a thirst, a sense of lack, which our Lord promises to satisfy. Really to know him, and to trust him is to have within the heart "a well of water springing up unto eternal life."

All that Jesus meant and promised, the woman could not have understood; but in her eager reply we hear voiced the inarticulate cry of every human heart: "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come all the way hither to draw."

Jesus now gives a command appealing to the conscience: "Go, call thy husband, and come hither." Why this command? Because no matter how fully we may admit the claims of Christ, or how truly we may understand his promises, we can never find satisfaction and peace till we make right the thing in the life that is wrong. Jesus has put his finger on the

sore spot in this life. She at once shrinks. Her answer is half true; it is made meditatively rather than in anger; the stranger has given a command which touches the dark secret of her soul. Not unnaturally she is heard to reply, "I have no husband."

Jesus at once makes a disclosure appealing to the religious instinct. He lays bare the whole story of her life, and in so doing reveals such divine insight that she at once calls him "a prophet," and asks him a question relative to the true place of worship. There are those who feel that she is shrewdly attempting to change the conversation which has become uncomfortably personal; but the connection of thought is evidently deeper. The revelation of her hidden life and the presence of a divine messenger appeal to that religious instinct which however dormant is never dead. The woman thinks of religion, however, as a matter of form and ceremony. She has never found any satisfaction in its observances. So, with some sincerity, she is asking the opinion of the prophet as to the proper place for religious rites. Possibly, she thinks, the mistake has

been here; should one worship at Mount Gerizim, as the Samaritans believed, or at Jerusalem, as the Jews taught?

Our Lord now makes a revelation appealing to hope. He tells the woman that her trouble has not been as to the place of worship, but as to the fact; she has never worshipped at all. "God is a Spirit" and true worship is therefore not a question of place but of faith and love, not a matter of form and ceremony, but of spiritual reality; its essence is found in a true knowledge of God and in fellowship with him as a loving Father. Jerusalem has indeed been the divinely appointed place of worship, related to the revelation of salvation made through the Jews, but the time has come when there are to be no local restrictions to worship. True worshippers will not be concerned with place and symbol, but will worship "in spirit and truth." That there is need of some Mediator to give this fuller knowledge of God, and to bring guilty souls into fellowship with him, is suggested by the immediate reply of the woman: "I know that Messiah cometh . . . he will declare unto us all things." Some hope of

such a Saviour had been kept alive in her heart, in spite of all her ignorance and sin.

The woman is now ready for the supreme word. This was a declaration appealing to faith: "I that speak unto thee am he." Does the woman believe? Her action is more eloquent than speech. Six times Jesus has addressed her and each time she has made a reply. His seventh word declares him to be the Messiah; she makes no verbal answer, but we read that she "left her waterpot, and went away into the city, and saith to the people, Come, see a man, who told me all things that ever I did: can this be the Christ?" We do not know just how perfect her faith may have been; but, to-day, when a man or woman is found so interested in Christ that the daily task is for a time forgotten, and the one desire is to tell others about Christ, we are safe to conclude that faith is real and vital. As we read how this new disciple goes on her surprising and successful mission, as we see the Samaritans coming forth to welcome the Messiah, the narrative reaches its climax of interest and inspiration.

In reply to the disciples who offer him food to eat, Jesus declares that his deeper satisfaction lies in revealing himself to fainting souls, as he has just done to the woman at the well. Those who seek him are sure to be surprised by the clear revelation of himself he delights to give.

As Jesus sees the Samaritans streaming forth to meet him, because of the witness they have heard, Jesus intimates that opportunities for fruitful testimony are always at hand for his followers. There is never reason for delay. The fields "are white already." It is as though others had sown the seed of the harvests we may reap, and our reward consists in the salvation of immortal souls.

As the Samaritans receive him gladly into their city and their hearts, demanding no miracle and trusting him simply because of his word, we catch a prophetic vision of the multitudes from all nations who will be glad to welcome the Messiah and to find life in him who is indeed "the Saviour of the world."

VI: The Sermon on the Mount

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God.

"Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (*Matthew* 5:3-10).

VI: The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is the most perfect summary we have of the laws of Christian living, it is the supreme discourse in the literature of the world. It must be read, however, in the light of that glory which radiates from the divine person of the Preacher, otherwise it would fill the mind with bewilderment and despair. By its lofty ideals and its perfect standards of conduct we are condemned, but the Law-giver to whose authority we bow is the Saviour to whom we look for pardon and for strength.

The subject of the sermon is introduced by those significant and precious phrases known as the Beatitudes. They describe the character and blessedness of those who have entered the kingdom of grace and are heirs of the kingdom of glory. This character is comprehended in the one inclusive term of "righteousness"; and this term is the theme of the discourse.

The righteousness which Christ requires of his followers is discussed first in relation to the moral law set forth by Moses and the prophets. This law Christ declares to be changeless and eternal. He seeks neither to abrogate nor to amend, but he interprets it as applying to motives as well as to acts; and he insists that true righteousness is not a matter of external obedience, of form or of pretence, as was the reputed righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, but that it is rather a matter of the heart, and is a submission of the soul which recognises in the law not an arbitrary code of conduct but an expression of the will of God.

Such righteousness Christ illustrates by references to the laws against murder and adultery and profanity and retaliation and hatred; and he shows how actually these laws may be broken by secret thought and evil desire, and how impossible it is to cover transgression by excuse. Such righteousness can be attained only by perfect love, and it is with this in view that our Lord can conclude, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

While true righteousness is not formal, it is not inconsistent, however, with religious forms. Thus in the second portion of his sermon, Christ discusses the most familiar acts of religious service, namely, almsgiving, prayer and fasting. He teaches that true righteousness in the matter of these religious observances must be tested by motives and by the attitude of the heart toward God. Almsgiving which is designed to secure the praise of men is not an expression of love for God but a mere selfish bargain with the hope of gain. Prayer which is offered in public in order to secure a reputation for piety is worse than a heathen incantation, for real prayer is an approach to God by one who is seeking his glory and asking for those things which are believed to be according to his will. A model of such prayer Christ gives in the incomparable petitions which begin with the familiar phrase, "Our Father which art in heaven."

So too, fasting or any other form of self-denial is mere hypocrisy if its purpose is to secure the admiration of men; if, however, it is due to sorrow for sin or is demanded by the welfare of others, then one may expect a

reward from the Father "who seeth in secret."

The third division of the discourse deals with true righteousness as it stands related to the world's goods, and to its moral evil. As to the former, one who is truly righteous will be on his guard against the contrasted temptations of avarice and of anxiety.

On the one hand, if riches increase he will not forget to lay up treasures in heaven, while striving for the fleeting treasures of earth. He will not allow the desire for gain to blind his moral sense. He will not permit himself to become possessed by his possessions. He will not be a slave to gold; he will remember that one "cannot serve God and mammon."

On the other hand, when poverty threatens, while not lacking in foresight or prudence, he will never allow his soul to be tortured by anxiety in reference to food and raiment; he will realise that worry can work no good; he will trust in the care of God whom he sees feeding the birds and clothing in beauty the flowers; he will seek his kingdom and his righteous-

ness and leave with him the morrow and its care.

As to the evil that is in the world, the righteous man will fall into the habit neither of censoriousness nor of carelessness. He cannot fail to form opinions of others, nor to condemn what is obviously wrong; but he is not unkind in his judgments nor does he rejoice in finding fault. He regards censoriousness as dangerous, as unreasonable, as hypocritical and as un-Christian.

On the other hand, one cannot afford to be indifferent to moral evil, particularly if he is a teacher of religious truth. He must have a due regard to persons as well as to times and places. There is such a thing as "casting pearls before swine."

To treat men justly, to be free from anxiety and avarice, to perform rightly our religious duties, to observe perfectly the moral law, requires more than human wisdom and strength, and the Sermon reaches its majestic climax as it discloses and emphasises the unlimited resources of prayer and the attitude which one

should maintain both toward God and toward his fellow men.

In relation to God the attitude should ever be that of a child toward a father, and one is encouraged to assume such an attitude by the gracious promise: "If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

In relation to our fellow men, Christ proclaims that incomparable "Golden Rule" of conduct, the observance of which would end all differences and discords between individuals, between classes and parties and between the nations of the world: "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them."

The conclusion of the discourse consists of three solemn exhortations presented in the form of parables. The first is that of the wide and the narrow gates and the broad and the straitened ways, leading to destruction and to life. By this picture Christ is urging his hearers to make an eager effort to enter into the kingdom of heaven. It is not difficult for one

to be lost, one needs only to drift with the current and to follow the crowd; but salvation is possible only where there are effort, sacrifice, courage and determined loyalty to Christ.

The second parable is that of the good and the corrupt trees which bring forth good and evil fruit, and which picture the tests which must be applied to teachers of religion against whose proffered guidance we must be on our guard. We must be assured of the character of such teachers before entrusting ourselves to their care.

The last picture is that of the two houses, the one founded on a rock and the other built upon the sand, and in the time of storm and flood the one stands firm and the other falls in hideous ruin. Thus shall it be in the time of testing and of judgment; only those who have heeded the words of Christ and have yielded true obedience to him will endure the trial and will stand secure.

With such serious possibilities of choice, the Sermon comes to its close. Surely the Teacher is likewise the Saviour. In him alone we must trust.

"His oath, His covenant, and His blood
Support me in the sinking flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my Hope and Stay.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand."

VII: The Transfiguration

"And as he was praying, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became white and dazzling. And behold, there talked with him two men, who were Moses and Elijah; who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (*Luke* 9:29-31).

"We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit" (*II Corinthians* 3:18).

VII: The Transfiguration

The transfiguration of our Lord, while he prays on the slopes of Mount Hermon, is closely and vitally related to the teaching he has been giving to the disciples near the villages of Cæsarea Philippi. He has accepted Peter's great confession as to his divine person, and now, out of the heavenly glory, comes the voice of the Father saying, "This is my beloved Son." He has taught them particularly of his approaching death; and now, upon the mountain, Moses and Elijah appear, talking with him, as Luke affirms, "of his decease which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." He has predicted his return in glory, and now, as Peter afterwards declared, he gives the disciples a foretaste of what that glory will be.

Just what is meant by the statement, "He was transfigured before them," it is difficult for us to understand. It is surely an experience quite different from that of Moses on the mountain. The face of Moses shone with a

reflected light; but, in the case of Jesus, a glory from within bursts forth and irradiates his whole being, until not only his face, but his very garments are radiant with a dazzling light. It is as if a monarch had been walking in disguise; only occasionally beneath his humble garment has been revealed a glimpse of the purple and the gold. Here, for an hour, the disguise is withdrawn and the King appears in his real majesty and in the regal splendour of his divine glory.

Jesus had been alone, with Peter, James, and John, when the startling change in his appearance occurred; but as the disciples gazed on him in wonder "Behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with him." The two men whose departure from the world had been veiled in mystery were chosen for this mysterious return. Moses is commonly supposed to represent the Law and Elijah the Prophets; both had pointed forward by symbol and prediction to the atoning work of Christ; these men could speak with Jesus intelligently concerning his coming death. Then, too, these men had been prepared peculiarly, by personal

experiences, to understand the grace of God, and therefore they best of all could comprehend the love of God in the gift of his Son.

"And Peter answered," that is, his remark was called forth by the startling experience, "Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, I will make here three tabernacles; one for thee, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Peter was dazed by the wonder and mystery of the scene. He did not know what to say. His words seem absurd; beings from the unseen world would hardly care for huts on a mountain side; it would not be a kindness long to detain here on earth visitors from heaven. However, his suggestion is far from meaningless; Peter is not to be ridiculed; he realised the blessedness of his experience; however clumsily expressed, his desire was to prolong such an ecstatic vision; in spite of his fear, he wished to continue in such blissful companionship.

Even while Peter was speaking, a bright cloud came and overshadowed them all. The scene was about to end; but first there came out of the cloud the voice of the Father conveying the supreme message of the hour, "This is

my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." There was no need of detaining Moses and Elijah. He had appeared, of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets had testified, even Jesus, the divine Son of God. The time had come when those who wished to know the nature and will and saving grace of God could find them completely and finally revealed in Jesus Christ his Son.

"And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one save Jesus only." They needed none other; him they were to hear; yet for a time the heavenly light was to fade; they were to follow him into the dark valley of the shadow of death; but they could never forget the vision of his revealed glory; henceforth he was to them more truly than ever a divine Lord and the coming King.

This unique experience was of deep significance to our Lord himself. It prepared him for the pain and death he so soon was to endure. It assured him again of his divine son-

ship; it reminded him that if he lost his life he would find it, if he endured the cross he would surely rise from the dead and meet the saints of old in a state of glory, in a position of supreme power.

This event was of still greater significance to the disciples. They, too, needed to be prepared for the trials which lay before them. Their belief in the divine nature of their Lord was strengthened by this vision of his glory; the mysterious predictions of his death and resurrection were confirmed by what they had seen and heard; the splendour of his final coming was henceforth more real, and in view of its certainty they were more ready than before to take up the cross and come after him.

No less important are the messages for his followers to-day. They are reminded that by faith in him, as they now behold his glory, they can be "transformed into the same image," "transfigured," not by an outward imitation of Christ but by the operation of an inner power "even as from the Lord the Spirit."

So, too, we see predicted more clearly the circumstances of his future appearing; then some, who like Moses have died, and whose bodies

have disappeared in burial, will appear in bodies deathless and immortal; others like Elijah, who never died, will not taste of death, but will be transformed, transfigured, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" and "be caught up . . . to meet the Lord in the air"; but the splendour of the scene will be embodied and centred in the majestic form and radiant face of the returning, triumphant King.

VIII: Washing the Disciples' Feet

"Ye call me Teacher and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, A servant is not greater than his lord; neither one that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them" (*John* 13: 13-17).

VIII: Washing the Disciples' Feet

While on their way to the upper room where for the last time before his death they are to meet with their Lord, or even as they are selecting their places at the table about which they are to partake of that "last supper," a dispute arises among the disciples as to which of them should be accounted greatest. Jesus takes the occasion to remind them that among his followers true greatness is to be measured by willingness to serve; and then he gives them a memorable object lesson to teach them at once the majesty, the possible forms and the motive of true service. He "riseth from supper, and layeth aside his garments; and he took a towel, and girded himself. Then he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash his disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded."

When he has finished his lowly task, is it possible for the dispute to continue? Is there any one in the circle too dull to understand the mes-

sage and the rebuke? Has not the Master shown his incomparable greatness by his willingness to render that lowly service which none of them had offered to undertake? Never before has the form of the Master seemed so majestic as when he bows down to wash his disciples' feet. Each one of the group feels that his boasted greatness has been dwarfed into pitiful insignificance by the act of his Lord. He realises that there cannot be gradations and differences among the infinitely small.

This lesson the followers of Christ, through all the ages, have needed to be taught again and again; and to-day, possibly as never before, they are showing that they believe nothing to be so royal, nothing so kingly, nothing so majestic, as lowly service for those who are in need.

The modes of service are varied. It can be rendered in many different spheres. It may be in the form of providing physical relief. Jesus bathed the feet of his followers because in that oriental land such an act was regarded as absolutely necessary to the comfort of those men who had met for that evening meal.

We are living in a world of hunger and pain and sickness, of men and women and helpless children who are suffering from the ravages of disease, of famine, of flood and of war; whatever may be done in the home, or in some distant land to lift from any one the burden of distress will be an act well-pleasing to the Master if done in his spirit and for his sake.

Yet Jesus did more than this for his disciples. When he stooped to wash his disciples' feet he really cleansed their hearts. As he resumed his seat in the astonished circle, all their jealousy and anger and pride had disappeared, they could think of nothing but the beauty and the loveliness of their Lord.

So we find about us those who are living with low ideals of life, or who have fallen beneath the standards they accept; we are in contact with those whose hearts are bitter with envy, or disappointment, or hatred, and it is possible for us, by some act of kindness, by some ministry of love, to lift to a higher plane those who have fallen, to make others ashamed of their weakness or forgetful of their wrath.

However, there is even a higher form of

service; it is that which our Lord symbolised when he washed his disciples' feet. It is that cleansing from the guilt and power of sin which he was to make possible by his atoning death. That act in the upper room was but a picture of the voluntary humiliation whereby he had laid aside his "existence-form as God," had assumed the garment of human flesh, had taken the place of a servant, and was about to submit to the cruel death of the cross, and all because he wished to wash from the souls of men the stains and defilement of sin.

This was the meaning of that notable dialogue between Jesus and Peter which interrupted the service the Master was rendering. Peter is insisting, "Thou shalt never wash my feet," and Jesus makes reply, "If I wash thee not thou hast no part with me," and no one is a real follower of Christ who is content to allow in his life the uncleanness and impurity of moral evil.

However, one who has known the redeeming power of Christ is in need of daily cleansing from daily defilement; for when Peter turns impulsively to the other extreme and cries, "not my feet only, but also my hands and my head,"

Jesus replies, "He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit."

That others may know this cleansing power we must bring them into vital fellowship with Christ. This is the highest service we can render to any human soul.

Whatever its mode or sphere, service can be rendered cheerfully and well only when one is animated by the supreme motive of love. It is an illuminating phrase with which John begins this story, "Having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them unto the end." Love unfailing, love unfaltering, love unforgetting, this is the explanation of the scene, and this too is the explanation of all true service. It is found in love to our fellowmen, and in love to Christ the Saviour of men.

"Wherever in the world I am,
In whatsoe'er estate,
I have a fellowship with hearts
To keep and cultivate,
And a work of lowly love to do
For the Lord on whom I wait."

IX: The Prayer of Our Lord

"These things spake Jesus; and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee: even as thou gavest him authority over all flesh, that to all whom thou hast given him, he should give eternal life. And this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" (*John* 17:1-3).

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4835 EAST ANAHEIM STREET
LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA

IX: The Prayer of Our Lord

"There is no voice which has ever been heard, either in heaven or in earth, more exalted, more holy, more fruitful, more sublime, than this prayer offered up by the Son of God himself." Such are the words of Melancthon; and such has been the verdict of the Christian centuries in reference to the seventeenth chapter of John. It is commonly regarded as "the most precious fragment of the past." Here we enter the holy of holies of the New Testament, for here we are given the most profound revelation of the very heart of our Lord.

This is, in truth, "The Lord's Prayer." We properly apply this name to the formula taught by Jesus to his disciples, and beginning: "Our Father who art in heaven"; but speaking more strictly, this is his prayer; he could not have used the petitions he taught his disciples, including as they do a request for forgiveness; and none of his disciples could have uttered these words.

If we wish convincing proof of the deity of Christ, it may be found in the majestic paragraphs of this prayer, in the sublime self-consciousness of the speaker, in his claim of universal dominion in his reference to a previous existence in living unity with the eternal God.

If on the other hand, we are not concerned with witness to the person of Christ but wish an answer to another question with which John is continually concerned, namely, what is the life in which faith in Christ will issue, we have here certain petitions offered, by the Son of God, for his followers; as they come from him, what are these but prophecies of blessing and promises to faith?

Jesus prays, first of all, for himself; but the petition has no taint or intimation of selfishness. He prays to be glorified, in order that he may glorify his Father, and thus give "eternal life" to his followers. "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee: even as thou gavest him authority over all flesh, that to all whom thou hast given him, he should give eternal life."

"The hour," was the expected time of his

death and resurrection. This prayer was uttered on the night of his agony only a few hours before his Passion. By his request to be glorified, Jesus referred to his crucifixion, his triumph over the grave, his ascension, and supremely his outpouring of the Holy Spirit. To "glorify" one is to make one known; Jesus desires to be made known in his true character, as the divine Son of God, as the Messiah, as the Saviour of the world. This manifestation all centred in "the hour" which had come, but which would include Pentecost and all that the gift of the Holy Spirit suggests. That gift constituted or secured the answer to this prayer. By "the glory" of the Son, the glory of the Father was secured. God was never so fully revealed in all his justice and love and holiness and grace, as by "the hour" with which we are now concerned.

Then, too, by this revelation, life was secured for the followers of Christ; for "this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." To "know," according to John's Gospel, is not merely an act of the mind; in that sense, demons know God; but it denotes

love, obedience, faith, the response of the entire being. Thus to know God as revealed in his Son is to have eternal life. This life is, therefore, not only a future, but a present experience; it denotes endless existence but also a heavenly blessedness.

This first petition Jesus based upon the fact that his earthly task was complete: "I have accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do." Already the supreme sacrifice seemed to him to have been made. His work was finished; and he could therefore pray; "And now, Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

How few men feel, under the shadow of death, that life has been complete, and its work finished! What a pathetic series of beginnings and failures and imperfect endeavours it does seem to be. Yet, if one seeks to do the will of God, the symbol of life need not be a broken column. Much may seem incomplete: only three years of ministry, only a few sick healed, only a few sermons preached, only eleven disciples secured, no book written, no organisation formed; but his work is finished; he need

not linger longer here; the cross remains, then glory.

Jesus prays next for his immediate disciples, for "the twelve" who had been with him; but he first describes them in phrases which have a meaning and a message for all who call themselves his followers: "The men whom thou gavest me out of the world," "they have kept thy word"; "the words which thou gavest me . . . they received"; "they believed that thou didst send me."

For these men Jesus prays: "I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me." He does not mean that he never prayed for the world, or that we should not so pray; but on this supreme occasion he wishes to ask certain things for his followers.

The petitions are two in number. First he prays that they may be kept from evil. During the earthly ministry of Jesus he has guarded his disciples, but now he is leaving them. The world will hate them. He therefore commits them to the care of his Father. He does not ask that they shall be taken out of the world as he himself is leaving the world.

He does not ask that they shall be kept from sorrow and pain and temptation, but from gloom and discouragement and sin. "I pray not that thou shouldest take them from the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one."

Their protection was to be effected by the agency of his Spirit, but also by the instrument of the truth concerning his Father. "While I was with them, I kept them in thy name," that is by means of what God was known to be, by the revelation which Jesus had given of the Father; and by the same means they will be kept after his departure: "Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou hast given me."

Secondly, Jesus prays that his disciples may be sanctified. This does not here refer specifically to holiness, or separation from sin. That was the burden of the first petition. The request is rather, that they may be set apart for service, and more specifically for the service of witnessing to the truth. It is really a prayer for the consecration of his chosen messengers to their appointed mission. "Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth." The revelation of the Father which Jesus had given, "the

truth" he had revealed, was to be not only the instrument of their consecration but the sphere of their service. Therefore Jesus adds, "As thou didst send me into the world, even so sent I them into the world," that is, to be his messengers, to testify to "the truth."

Having prayed for himself and his disciples, Jesus now prays for all believers, "that they may all be one," and that at last they may be with him in heavenly "glory." The first petition, for the oneness of believers, refers to something quite different and far more wonderful than the "church unity," the "organic union" the "united Christendom," to which it is commonly supposed to refer. It contemplates a spiritual unity, which must be given visible expression, but which, in its essence, consists of a union with Christ, and through him with God. Jesus prayed "that they also may be in us." The prayer was given its initial answer on the Day of Pentecost when, by the Holy Spirit, believers were "all baptized into one body." So Paul does not pray for "church unity," but insists that it already exists. Even now, "there is one body," composed of all who

are united with Christ, as there is "one Spirit, . . . one hope . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all."

There does remain, however, a further fulfilment of this petition, and for it we are to work and to pray. This spiritual unity must be made manifest, and so manifest as to be an irresistible argument for the divine mission of Christ: "that the world may know that thou didst send me." What this ultimate expression may be, in this present age of imperfect knowledge, none is wise enough to predict. There is little hope, perhaps no reasonable desire, for unity of organisation, for uniformity of worship, for unanimity of creed; certainly not if any of these must be secured by compulsion, or by the sacrifice of conviction. There is, however, much that can be done by every believer: first, accept and act upon the reality of our vital union as members of the one body of Christ, whatever our particular "church" or "society" may be; second, remember that Christian unity can be advanced only by an increasing knowledge of Christ and of the truth which he reveals; third, manifest the love, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, and patience which

are the fruit of the Spirit, and look to the guidance of that Spirit to lead us toward that manifestation of unity for which a lost world still waits.

A time is surely coming when this manifestation will be complete. "When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory." It is with a petition for this future "glory" of the Church that the prayer of Jesus reaches its climax. "Father, I desire that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me." Of course believers enjoy a present glory; "the glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them," the glory of being children of God and possessors of eternal life; but there is greater blessedness in store for them, an actual vision of Christ, a share in the ineffable glory granted to the Son by the love of the Father. For such glory Jesus pleads on the ground of the faith of his followers, and of his continuing revelation to them, and of his own abiding presence with them.

It is the last phrase, "I in them," which is the assurance and condition of the answer to this

high-priestly prayer of intercession. The indwelling Christ, by his Spirit, is the power and agent by whom his followers are being kept from sin, sanctified in service, given unity of life, made ready for glory.

X: The Friends of Jesus

"This is my commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you. No longer do I call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known unto you" (*John* 15:12-15).

X: The Friends of Jesus

That was a notable and illuminating word which the Master spoke on that memorable occasion in the upper room when addressing the men he most dearly loved, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

It revealed to them and it also intimates to us something of the nature and value of human friendships, and, further still, what it is for us to have Jesus as our Friend.

For our Saviour to have suggested that the relation which his followers sustain to him can be designated as "friendship" throws a new halo of beauty and of glory about all the real friendships of earth.

Something of the value of friendship has been appreciated by men and women of all the ages. "I can only urge you," wrote Cicero, "to prefer friendship to all human possessions." We are told of the king who gave to a courtier a cup of gold, but to another a kiss. The one who received the first was envied by

his fellows until they saw the king bestow upon the other courtier that which was so much more precious because it was a sign of intimacy and of love.

It is said that Mrs. Browning asked Charles Kingsley what was the secret of his life, "Tell me that I may make mine beautiful, too." He replied, "I had a friend." Probably all of us have learned something of the stimulating and ennobling influences of true friendship.

Phillips Brooks remarked, "There is yet no culture, no method of progress, known to man that is so rich and complete as that which is ministered by a truly great friendship."

Thomas à Kempis wrote, "Without a friend thou canst not well live; and if Jesus be not above all friends to thee, thou shalt be indeed sad and desolate."

What then is the essence and nature of this relationship to Christ which he describes under this beautiful and sacred term?

Friendship has been defined as consisting in mutual admiration based upon sympathy. Of course there must be sympathy; persons must have something in common if they are to be

friends. They may find themselves drawn together on the lowest possible levels, it might be even a fellowship in sin such as drew together the Jew of Malta and his slave. It is more commonly the sharing of some form of recreation or of some worthy endeavour which constitutes the bond of sympathy; and when on this basis admiration arises, it forms a union which is rightly designated as friendship.

This must have been in part the meaning of Jesus when he decelared that his disciples would be his friends if they obeyed his commands. They had learned to love him because he realised their ideal of all that was noblest and best. It was their admiration for him that drew them close to him and formed the basis of their friendship. He therefore assured them, and he assures us, that if we share his high purposes, if we seek to do his will, then his friendship for us and ours for him will become to us more vital and more real. We are the friends of Christ when we obey him; and when we obey, his friendship to us is most precious.

Friendship has further been described as trust responding to self-revelation. This was

probably what Christ meant when he added, "No longer do I call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known unto you." Jesus showed himself to be a friend by the disclosures of his own thought and feeling, and especially of his knowledge of the Father; and the disciples showed themselves to be friends when they received as true and accepted as their own all that Jesus revealed to them. Where there is friendship there must be such confidence and such trust. One has remarked that when two friends separate they should lock up the secrets of their hearts and exchange the keys. What an example of trust was that which Jesus finally gave to John, when as he hung upon the cross he committed his own dear mother into the care and keeping of the disciple whom he loved. On the other hand, how truly John showed his friendship as he wrote his Gospel and expressed his absolute confidence in Christ as his Saviour and his God.

We are friends of Jesus when we believe what he has revealed himself to be and trust

ourselves wholly to him. Can we trust him with our happiness? Can we really believe that life will be more full of sunlight and gladness when we do his will than when we follow the bidding of any recreant desire or passion?

Can we trust him with the past, believing that over it we have no control and that he is able to weave into some beautiful pattern even our blunders, our failures and our faults? Can we intrust to him all the future, with its mysteries, its hopes, and its fears? If so, we are true friends of Jesus.

Friendship in its very essence, however, has been regarded as being affection responding to self-sacrifice. Friendship attains its height and its glory in love, and true love is never selfish; it never seeks to get, but always to give. As long as any gain or self-satisfaction is the motive for action, love is imperfect. When, however, love is begotten by a consciousness of being loved, when true affection is called forth by tokens of self-sacrifice and devotion, then it attains its true height and the resultant bond is worthy of the name "friendship."

This is beautifully illustrated in the case of

David and Jonathan; in the case of Ruth and Naomi; but supremely in the picture of Jesus and his disciples.

We hear him saying: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends." It is as we realise all that Christ has done for us that our hearts go out in devotion to him. We are truly his friends when we obey him and trust him and love him.

"Oh, dearly, dearly has he loved,
And we must love him too,
And trust in his redeeming blood,
And try his works to do."

XI: Judas and Peter

"Then Judas, who betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood. But they said, What is that to us? see thou to it. *And he cast down the pieces of silver into the sanctuary, and departed; and he went away and hanged himself"* (*Matthew* 27:3-5).

"And the Lord turned. and looked upon Peter. Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how that he said unto him, Before the cock crow this day thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly" (*Luke* 22:61-62).

XI: Judas and Peter

There is an obvious difference between the experience of the man who, after moving steadily down a mountain side, leaps over a precipice to voluntary death, and the man who, in his ascent, slips at a sudden turn of the trail, falls, rises in pain, but then presses on heroically to the mountain crest.

Such a contrast may illustrate, at least crudely, the difference between the sin of Judas and the sin of Simon Peter. One was the last desperate act in a life which had been steadily descending from bad to worse, the other was the temporary failure in a character which was rising to greater heights of spiritual experience and of devoted service.

However, there are points of comparison between the two; both men belonged to the circle of the nearest friends of Jesus, both had been chosen to be his apostles, both had been warned of their peril, both wounded the Master's heart, both brought reproach upon his name; and,

what is of more importance to us, both have their parallels among the professed followers of Christ to-day.

As to the character of Judas and the exact nature of his crime, there exist differences of opinion. Some regard him as a true patriot and as a devoted friend of Jesus, who was persuaded that his Master was the true Messiah, who thought that by placing him in the hands of his enemies he would precipitate a needed crisis, compel Jesus to exert his divine power, to throw off the yoke of Rome and give political freedom to the Jews; when the kind plan of Judas miscarried, he died in an agony of grief. Others go to an opposite extreme and picture Judas as an incarnate fiend, unnatural, inhuman, literally a devil, or one so truly demon-possessed that he had little in common with other men. The statements of the Gospels, relative to Judas, seem to give us a view between these two extremes, and to paint for us a character so human, so natural, so familiar, that it supplies a continual and practical but solemn warning for all men, even for professed Christians.

Judas is simply an example of the man who

cherishes a secret sin while openly following Christ. He may have regarded Jesus as a worker of miracles who was to establish a temporal kingdom, at first he even may have admired Jesus, but he never trusted in him, he had no real faith; his love was for gold, avarice was his lord. He probably possessed qualities which would have made him of great service to the Master. When he was appointed treasurer for the little company of disciples, he might have surrendered his sin and have developed into a saint, but he retained his sin, he reacted against the purifying influences of the Master, he rebelled against his teachings, until he began to cherish hatred for his cause, and at last plotted against his life. The more plain the teaching of Christ, the more loving his entreaties, the more arresting his rebukes, the more serious his warnings, only the more rapidly does evil develop in the heart of Judas. Avarice degenerates into dishonesty, dishonesty into malice, and malice into treachery. He follows Christ, at first, in hope of gain, then he steals from the treasury, then he betrays his Lord for thirty pieces of silver. The last act is not sudden, it is not surprising; he has long

been gravitating toward it; and when he realises the enormity of his crime, there is no real repentance, only bitter remorse which drives him to end his life by suicide "that he might go to his own place."

Such is the peril of every man who clings to his sin in the presence of Christ. It may be the sin of avarice, or of pride, or of impure desire, or of dishonesty, or of envy; but if such evil is cherished in spite of the light and truth and knowledge which the Master gives, the decay of virtue is only the more rapid, until repentance becomes impossible and only remorse and death remain.

The story of the sin of Peter is more simple, and its sequel less tragic. He was a true believer in Jesus, he trusted himself to his Master as to the true Messiah, "the Christ, the Son of God." His faith never failed, for his Master had prayed that it should not. His courage failed, however, and in a moment of weakness he denied his Lord; but he at once repented of his sin, as he "went out, and wept bitterly," and he found the peace of pardon and the joy of renewed service.

His failure is explained on the ground of his

self-confidence and his cowardice. There is no lack of love for the Master, but when he is alone and suddenly confronted with temptation he is a victim of sudden fear, and he denies his Lord, first by a falsehood, then in anger, and finally with curses and oaths.

In some of these exact ways professed followers of Christ, who really love him, actually deny him. Deception and anger and careless reference to sacred things are among the most common forms of denying the Lord. The secret of these and similar expressions of disloyalty is found in moral cowardice; courage fails, in some unexpected situation, and almost before one realises what is being done, the deceitful word has been spoken, the angry reply has been made, the unholy thought has been expressed.

Then comes some remembrance of the loving Master whose heart has been pained by our weakness. There results the sorrow of true repentance, and then a meeting alone with the risen Lord, the new confession of love, and the passionate devotion to his cause. No one who has truly trusted in Christ will betray him, but one who loves him may know the anguish of

failure and the chastened joy of forgiveness and of fellowship restored.

"In the hour of trial,
Jesus, plead for me;
Lest by base denial
I depart from Thee:
When Thou seest me waver,
With a look recall,
Nor for fear of favor
Suffer me to fall."

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XII: At the Cross

"Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (*Isaiah* 53:4-6).

XII: At the Cross

After the night in which a city had been devastated by fire and storm, a cathedral spire was seen standing unscathed amid the ruins and surmounted by its cross of gold. Then Sir John Bowring composed his famous hymn:

"In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime."

It is certainly true that the cross of Christ appears to-day towering in triumph above fallen systems of false belief, above the shattered ambitions of selfishness, above the ravages of relentless years, a symbol of love, of faith and of hope; it is also true that about the cross centre those essential realities by which the followers of Christ are strengthened, inspired and transformed.

Therefore it is helpful for us at times to turn

back in memory to the very scenes of Calvary itself, to picture to ourselves the various figures which there appear, and to recall the serious messages which the review suggests.

First of all, and most vividly of all, we behold him who, in nameless agony, is suffering there for us, "wounded for our transgressions . . . bruised for our iniquities," bearing "our sins in his body"; and as we realise anew his redeeming love our eyes dim with tears, our hearts throb with new devotion, and we share more deeply the sentiment of another immortal hymn, possibly the most favoured and the most moving of all our sacred songs.

"When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

The soldiers are there, poor, brutal, ignorant instruments of Rome; and by them we are re-

minded of the satanic cruelties of which men still are capable, even in the presence of Christ, even in the name of Christ, even toward Christ and his followers; but then, too, we remember that there should be no place in our hearts for malice or bitter hatred toward those who really do not understand the nature of their crimes, for we hear the Master pray: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

The chief priests are there, mocking him; men who have sinned against light, men upon whom rests the responsibility for this cruelty and crime, and we hear them say, "He saved others; himself he cannot save." They speak more truly than they think: "He saved others," but only because he would not save himself; and he can save those who believe and trust him, others he cannot save.

Then, there are those who are passing by and who are crying out in derision, "Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross." Little do they dream that in three days the temple of his body will be rebuilt and he

will triumph over death. Should these undoubted facts of resurrection and the empty tomb have no meaning to careless sceptics today? "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"

Two robbers are there, crucified with him, yet ready to unite in the mockery. One of them, in a single hour, passes through the whole experience of repentance and faith and pardon and receives the blessed word of assurance: "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." He is saved in his last hour, so none of us need despair; yet he alone of the multitudes is saved thus, so none of us should presume. How much clearer is our vision of Christ! How much greater has been our opportunity of knowing the Saviour! Is there one whose case is more desperate, is there one whose need is so great? In the hour of death it is not too late to be saved, but is it safe to delay our decision? Do we know when that hour is to be, and shall we not now call upon him for mercy, that the day of death may be likewise the day of conscious blessedness in the presence of our Lord?

Then too, near the cross, we see that pathetic group whose souls are wrung with anguish, John "the disciple whom Jesus loved," Mary the mother of Jesus, and the other women who have followed Jesus from Galilee. John seems to have guided the little party to the place of death, that they may catch one last glimpse of their Lord, that they may comfort him by their presence or possibly receive from him some word of farewell; and now the devotion of John is rewarded as the Master, more mindful of others than of his own sufferings, commits his mother to the care of his trusted friend. Together they turn from the cross, to go at once to the home of John, while the women who are with them follow for a time and then turn to behold from afar the scene of tragedy and terror. Probably every one, who like John approaches the cross of Christ with a heart of burning sympathy, goes away from the cross with some commission for new service and to render some tender ministry for those whom Jesus loves.

Now deep darkness settles not only upon the scene of suffering but upon the soul of the

Saviour, and he who was "made to be sin on our behalf" seems to experience the hiding of his Father's face; but victory is near, and while the earth quakes and rocks are rent and graves are opened, and the veil of the Temple is torn asunder, he utters his cry of triumph, he dismisses his spirit, and the work of redemption is "finished." No wonder that the centurion, who saw the victorious death, cried, "Truly this man was the Son of God"; and surely every one who stands thoughtfully at the cross and interprets its meaning in the light of Scripture, in the light of the sufferer's claims, and in the light of history, must see in him who suffered there not only the "Strong Son of God" but also "immortal Love," the mighty Servant, who came "to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many," a personal Saviour, a divine Master and Lord.

XIII: The Day He Arose

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures" (*I Corinthians* 15:3-4).

"And if Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain" (*I Corinthians* 15:14).

"But now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; then they that are Christ's, at his coming" (*I Corinthians* 15:20-23).

XIII: The Day He Arose

A modern artist, Eugene Bernand, has painted for us the now famous picture of the disciples Peter and John running to the sepulchre on the morning of the resurrection. In the faces of the disciples he portrays the contending emotions of sorrow and joy, of anguish and relief, of despair and hope; but the bending forms and fixed eager gaze turn our thoughts forward to the tomb and instinctively we ask ourselves, What did they find, and what were the experiences of these men and of their fellow disciples that day on which their Lord rose from the dead?

With the answer we are familiar, but it may be well for us to review the main features of the story because their experiences may be ours, and the glad messages of that day some of us now may need.

First of all when they reached the tomb they found that the guard had gone. Those coarse,

brutal, careless soldiers had attested and then had denied the resurrection of Christ. While they were watching at the sealed sepulchre they had been startled by an earthquake, they had seen an angel descend and roll away the stone; they had looked in wonder upon an empty tomb; they had hastened to report the marvel to the rulers and had been bribed by them to say, "His disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept."

For us too the guards are gone. There is nothing to-day to keep us from the empty tomb. There is no reason for doubting its witness to the resurrection of our Lord. To be sure there are some faint echoes of the falsehood circulated by the guard. Some men may really believe that terrified disciples, who had fled for their lives, boldly returned and dragged the body of Jesus from the tomb which was sealed by a stone and guarded by armed men. Some profess to believe that Jesus did not die, but that he only swooned upon the cross, and creeping from the tomb made his disciples believe he had risen from the dead. Some maintain that the apostles forged a lie, and others that these phlegmatic fishermen, who had no hope

of seeing their Master again, were victims of hallucination and of dreams.

All these explanations of the empty tomb are like that of the guard. Theirs was not original, they were taught it by others. Theirs was absurd, for if at the time they were "asleep," how could they know who came to the grave and what was done? Such are all other explanations of the empty tomb. There is only one we can accept. It was the empty tomb of a risen Lord. For us the guard has gone.

Yet the angels also are gone. One had been seen by the soldiers and two were seen by Mary and her friends, but none by Peter and John. However, the angels sent a message to all the disciples, "He is risen from the dead; and lo, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him."

To us no angels now appear, but God does send messengers who bring to us glad tidings of resurrection and of life. Some hear him speaking in the burst of dawn, some in the breath of spring, some in the opening of a flower, some in a phrase from the Gospel, some in the fragment of a hymn. By tender hearts,

voices of hope and cheer are heard even in the shadow of the tomb.

The angels are gone, but there are in that sepulchre evidences enough to convince the beloved disciple that his Lord has risen indeed. There are "the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, that was upon his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself." These facts are but trifles, yet in an empty tomb they are witness enough. "He saw and believed."

A heart full of love for Christ requires but little proof to find in him a living Lord. The evidence which brought rapturous belief to John left Peter in hopelessness and gloom. The apostle of love was the first person to believe in a risen Christ, and he it was who afterwards recorded that beatitude which fell from the lips of his living Lord, a beatitude the blessedness of which he was the first to know and in which we all now share, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

The first, however, to see the risen Lord was Mary of Magdala, Mary the mourner; and

surely the mourner most needs the message of an Easter day. She was weeping by the grave of her buried hopes, distressed because she could not find the body of her Lord. Suddenly she turned and was amazed to see standing before her the living glorious form of the risen Christ. As she falls at his feet she hears the words which are still bringing divine comfort to bereft and broken hearts, "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended unto the Father: but go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God."

Do we wonder where the loved one has gone? The risen Saviour bids us look not downward toward the grave, but upward into the glory. Do we long for reunion? Then instead of the "never more" of unbelief comes the "not yet" of faith. Are we puzzled by the dark providences of God? Then think of him as the "Father" who deals with us in perfect love. Is the loneliness too bitter to bear? Then believe that our Lord has "ascended," which means for us that he is an abiding Presence, a divine Comforter, an unseen, unfailing Friend.

The first disciple to see the Master, on the

day he arose, was Simon Peter, and no one more needs a vision of the living Christ than the man who has denied his Lord. Where Jesus found his penitent follower, whose heart was crushed with remorse, we do not know, nor are we told what words of confession and forgiveness were there exchanged; but of this we are sure, it is possible for every one who feels the shame and disgrace of disloyalty to Christ to meet with him alone to-day and to receive from him pardon and peace.

Now the shadows are lengthening and two disciples are seen walking in sadness through the deepening twilight toward Emmaus, their home. The risen Christ appears and walks with them; but they fail to recognise him even while he communes with them and explains the inspired predictions of his sufferings and of his glory. Only when their destination has been reached do they discover that they are in the actual presence of their living Lord; and then he vanishes out of their sight.

Is not our experience the same? Do we not fail to recognise the divine companion who is with us always, ready to cheer and strengthen

us, to open to us the Scriptures, and to reveal himself to us in the breaking of bread? Yet there is this difference; when the journey of life is ended and we reach our home, "we shall see him as he is" and the vision will not vanish in darkness but will be the abiding glory of an endless day.

"Who walks beside me in the gloom?
Who shares the burden wearisome?
Who all the dim way doth illume,
And bids me look beyond the tomb,
The larger life to live?"

The last scene of all is in the upper room where the disciples have been accustomed to meet with their Lord. There with darkness and danger about them they are listening to the testimony brought by certain of their number that their Lord has been seen alive, risen from the dead; and suddenly the Master himself stands in their midst, he shows them his hands and his feet, he speaks to them the word of peace, he commissions them to be his witnesses and he imparts to them his Spirit.

Such too have been the repeated experiences

of his followers through all the passing years. As they have gathered in his name and have spoken together of his resurrection glory, he has become to them a living Presence, he has brought peace to their troubled hearts, he has sent them out to testify for him, filled with his Spirit and rejoicing in his love.

"Neither might the gates of death,
Nor the tomb's dark portal,
Nor the watchers, nor the seal,
Hold Thee as a mortal:
"But to-day amidst the Twelve
Thou didst stand, bestowing
That Thy peace, which evermore
Passeth human knowing."

XIV: The Ascension

"So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken unto them, was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God" (*Mark* 16:19).

"And he led them out until they were over against Bethany: and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven" (*Luke* 24:50, 51).

"And when he had said these things, as they were looking, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they were looking steadfastly into heaven as he went, behold two men stood by them in white apparel; who also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? This Jesus who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven" (*Acts* 1:9-11).

XIV: The Ascension

The earthly life of our Lord does not close with the story of an empty tomb but of opening skies, not of an appearing to his disciples but of his disappearing in a cloud as he is "received up into heaven." The ascension, therefore, is not to be regarded as a mere poetic fancy but as a sober fact, and as such it is twice recorded by the accurate historian Luke.

It is an event quite distinct from the resurrection which it followed after an interval of forty days. It brings us into the sphere of mystery, but it is a reality which was given a place of prominence in the preaching of the apostles, and has a meaning and a message for all who love our Lord.

First of all, in his ascension Christ passed from the sphere of the seen and temporal into that of the unseen and eternal. Ever since his resurrection Jesus had been meeting frequently with his disciples, eating and drinking with

them, teaching them and "speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God"; now he finally and formally withdraws from his followers: "A cloud received him out of their sight"; henceforth he will be an unseen Presence; he will speak to them by his Spirit.

"He was taken up"; but we are not to suppose that he passed through infinite spaces and is now at a vast distance in some sphere infinitely remote. There is no "up" or "down" in the universe. To say that he ascended is a correct but merely conventional use of speech; it describes the withdrawal of our Lord from human sight and material conditions into the realm of the heavenly and the spiritual.

The word must not intimate to us that he is far away. Those who witnessed the event were the very men who henceforth regarded him as ever near and rejoiced in his divine fellowship. In no degree have we begun to fathom the mysteries of the unseen world; but we must not suppose it to be far away. He is nearer than we dream. The truth of his ascension should not weaken but strengthen our consciousness of companionship with the Lord we love.

Then too this experience of Christ is closely related to the truth as to his glorious and visible return. Some day he will reappear. He will emerge from the sphere of the unseen, he will be manifest to human sight. The very narrative of his ascension lays chief stress upon the promise of his coming again, "And while they were looking steadfastly into heaven as he went, behold two men stood by them in white apparel; who also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? this Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven." The story of the ascension should quicken the hope of his return.

It should further assure us that our future life is not that of disembodied spirits. However marvellously changed, there was a continuous identity in the body of the crucified risen ascended Christ. Whatever changes had occurred in that body as it left the tomb, it seems to have been "glorified," not then, but now as he withdraws from the sight of men. Whatever "resurrection" may mean for us, however the living are to be "changed" when

the Lord returns, we are sure that our perfected spirits are at last to be clothed with immortal bodies, and their type and pattern is found in the glorified body of the ascending Christ.

Then again, at the time of his ascension, our Lord assumed universal power. Then he began to exercise "all authority . . . in heaven and on earth." Henceforth he cannot be regarded as a mere human teacher, a prophet, a martyr; he now returns to the glory he had with the Father "before the world was"; he again exists in the form of God. As the Apostles' Creed affirms, "He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty." As he declares in the Apocalypse, "I also overcame and sat down with my Father in his throne."

We are puzzled by his providences, we wonder at his long delays, but we believe "he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him," and that in his loving care, yes, in his pierced hands, lie the destinies of all mankind. One who catches a

clear view of the ascension best of all understands the unique Person and the saving work of Christ.

Last of all, it may be stated that the ascension made possible the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This was what John meant when he said "the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified." This too was the meaning of the Master's word, "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you."

Surely, the Spirit of God always had been present and regnant in the world, but only when the Person and work of Christ were attested by his return to glory, only then could his Spirit be manifested in promised Pentecostal power. If we are to know the guidance and comfort of his Spirit in daily life, if we are to be more and more completely "transformed" by his Spirit into his "image," if we are to be fearless and effective in proclaiming the gospel of his grace, our faith must be fixed upon him as our risen, ascended, glorified Lord,

whom not having seen we love; on whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

THE END

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